

# THE GREAT BLACKBEARD AND OTHER PIRATE CHIEFS

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THE GREAT BLACKBEARD MEDITATING HIS CHIEF.

WHEN Columbus first landed in the western hemisphere it was on one of the Bahama islands. At that time many of the islands of this group were inhabited, but Columbus continued his cruises on to Cuba and Hayti, where he established settlements and began that great work of exploitation which in a few years nearly wiped out the native population. When the natives were so reduced in numbers that there were not enough to work the mines, the Spaniards sent expeditions up to seize the natives of the Bahama islands. This work was so thoroughly done that within sixty or seventy years the Bahamas were totally depopulated. And it was not until a hundred years later, in 1657, that an English adventurer, named Capt. Sayle, made the first white settlement that was started in the Bahamas. He called it New Providence. One hundred and seventy-five years had passed since the first white man had landed in the group, and in all that time not one had discovered what a beautiful spot the little island of New Providence is.

And yet, behold what a dog in the manger policy the Spaniards exhibited when they heard that Capt. Sayle had founded a settlement in the Bahamas. They pounced down upon the infant settlement, roasted the governor over an open fire, destroyed everything they couldn't carry off, and then departed for sunny Hispaniola.

The fact that all the settlers of New Providence were wreckers and pirates may have given the Spaniards cause for their rude behavior; but however rude it was, it was not rude enough. The pirates continued to make New Providence (or Nassau, as it is today) their headquarters, and they used the numerous small bays of the Bahamas and the hundreds of tortuous channels and shallow waterways as their retreats. Throughout the entire chain of islands the pirates and buccaners flourished and increased, until the Spaniards became much exasperated. Time after time they returned to wipe out the pirates, but without success. Finally the pirates scuttled some ships of his British majesty, and King George sent Capt. Woodes Rogers with instructions to reform the pirates or wipe them out.

At that time Nassau was the rendezvous of Edward Teach, alias "Blackbeard," the leader of the most desperate band of pirates the world has ever seen.

Blackbeard was a pirate who lived up to all that one would expect of a pirate. He had long, black, flowing whiskers, which he wore twisted in little tails, and had lighted matches under his hat, sticking out over each of his ears. At such times he looked like the devil, and it is said that to be the latter's mortal understudy was his chief ambition in life. If one would have called him a demon

incarnate, Blackbeard would have considered it a great compliment.

To illustrate just the sort of a pirate Blackbeard was, the following little incident may be illuminating. One day, while his pirate ship was lying under the lee of Hog island, in Nassau harbor, he decided that things were dull and that he would get up a little amusement to while the idle hours away. So he made himself look more devilish than usual and took all his crew down between decks, battened down the hatches, and set fire to a ton of brimstone. The crew nearly perished before they could burst open the hatches and escape, but Blackbeard sat through it all, breathing fumes and smoke and grinning with diabolical glee.

When the pirates of Nassau heard that Capt. Woodes Rogers was coming over they held a congress to decide what their action should be. Some wished to fortify the island and defy the captain; others were in favor of accepting the terms of his majesty's proclamation, which granted them pardon for past offenses if they behaved in the future.

Capt. Jennings, the commodore of the pirates and a man of good estate and intelligence before he took to pirating, resolved to surrender and be good, and, influenced by his action, about 150 others also took the pledge, although most of them never lived up to it. For example, of those who took the pledge, Benjamin Horingold, William Burgess, and Oliver la Rouché were afterward engaged in pirating and were cast away; Blackbeard and Maj. Penner were killed and their crews captured; James Fife was killed by his own men; John Martel was marooned on a desert island; Thomas Cockelyn, R. Sample, and Charles Vane were hanged; Christopher Winter and Nicholas Brown were captured by Spaniards, and Capt. England fled to Madagascar, where he became one of the pirate kings who ruled in that far away island.

When Capt. Rogers arrived in Nassau most of the pirates who were then ashore surrendered to him, but Charles Vane called out of one entrance to the harbor while the British man of war came in the other, and so escaped. As stated above, the pirates, like many political delegates, did not consider their instructions binding.

One day Capt. Rogers sent out a sloop to get provisions and gave the command to a reformed pirate named John Augur. It seems that John's reformation was only skin deep, for when he got out to sea he began pirating with a vengeance, capturing a couple of sloops, and decided that he would leave the Bahamas. Unfortunately, a storm came up and wrecked his vessel, so that he and his crew were cast upon a lonely island, where they lived in the woods. In course of time Capt. Rogers heard of their plight and sent an armed sloop out to capture them. They

were promptly captured and brought to Nassau for trial. One of them turned king's evidence and he escaped, while the other ten were sentenced to be hanged.

Thus, upon a beautiful day, the ten back-sliding pirates were brought out in the open air to fulfill their part in the ceremony. Grouped around them were hundreds of reformed pirates, who were addressed in scathing and contemptuous terms by the condemned men. The details are from Johnson's "History of the Pirates":

"I never thought to have seen the time," said one in his ante-mortem address, "when ten such men as we should be tied up and hanged like dogs, and 400 of our sworn

Capt. Skinner and spoke with a savage leer. "O, Capt. Skinner! Is it you? The only man I wished to see; I am very much in your debt, and now I shall pay you all in your own coin."

The poor captain trembled in every joint, but not for long; for the wicked pirates tied him to the windlass and pelted him with glass bottles; then they whipped him about the deck till they were tired, and then they said that because he had been such a good master he should have an easy death, and so shot him through the head.

Charles Vane was the pirate who escaped from Nassau harbor when Capt. Woodes Rogers sailed in. As he sailed out he blazed

carry you to Jamaica and hang you."

"Which way can I get off?" answers Vane. "Are there not fishermen's dories upon the beach? Can't you take one of them?" replies Holford.

"What!" says Vane, "would you have me steal a dory?"

"Do you make it a matter of conscience," said Holford, "to steal a dory when you have been a common pirate and robber, stealing ships and cargoes and plundering all mankind that fell in your way? Stay here, if you are so squeamish. And so left him."

After Capt. Holford's departure another ship put in at the island for water and Vane got a berth on this vessel. Unfortunately, this ship met Capt. Holford's ship one day, and the captain came aboard to dine. As he passed along the cabin he chanced to cast his eye down the hold and there saw Charles Vane at work. He immediately spoke to the captain, saying: "Do you know who you have got aboard here?" "Why," says the other captain, "I have shipped a man who was cast away on an island in a trading sloop. He seems to be a brisk hand."

"I tell you," says Capt. Holford, "it is Vane, the notorious pirate."

"If it be him," replies the other, "I won't keep him."

"Why, then," says Holford, "I'll send and take him aboard and surrender him at Jamaica."

So Capt. Holford took his old friend Vane to Jamaica, where he was convicted and hanged. It is to be presumed that Capt. Holford at last was satisfied that he had done his duty.

The pirates in those days were well organized and had an established code of business ethics. For example, Capt. Bartholomew Roberts, a famous pirate, had the following set of articles which each of his pirate crew was obliged to accept under oath. Why he thought an oath would make the agreement more binding, we don't know; but it is evident he thought greater security would be insured by an oath.

"It is to every one's interest to observe these articles, if they are minded to keep up so abominable a combination," he said.

Article I. Every man has a vote in affairs of moment; has equal title to the fresh provision or strong liquors at any time seized, and may use them at pleasure, unless scarcity make it necessary, for the good of all, to vote a retrenchment.

Article II. Every man to be called fairly in turn, by list, on board of prizes, because (over and above their proper share) they were on these occasions allowed a shift of clothes. But if they defrauded the company to the value of a dollar, in plate, jewels, or money, marooning was their punishment.

This was a barbarous custom of putting the offender on shore on some desolate or unin-

habited cape or island with a gun, a few shot, a bottle of water, and a bottle of powder, to subsist with or starve. If the robbery was only between one another, they contented themselves with slitting the ears and nose of him that was guilty and setting him on shore, not in an uninhabited place, but somewhere where he was sure to encounter hardships.

Article III. No person to game at cards or dice for money.

Article IV. The lights and candles to be put out at 8 o'clock at night. If any of the crew after that hour still remained inclined for drinking, they were to do it on the open deck.

Capt. Roberts believed this would check their debauches. He was a sober man himself, but found at length that all his endeavors to put an end to their debauchery proved ineffectual.

Article V. To keep their pieces, pistols, and cutlasses clean and fit for service.

Article VI. No boy or woman to be allowed among them. If any man carried a woman to sea disguised he was to suffer death.

It seemed that Capt. Roberts regarded a woman as a dangerous instrument of division and quarrel.

Article VII. To desert the ship or their quarters in battle was punished with death or marooning.

Article VIII. No striking one another on board, but every man's quarrels to be ended on shore, at sword and pistol.

Article IX. No man to talk of breaking up their way of living till each has shared \$5,000. If, in order to do this, any man should lose a limb or become a cripple in their service, he was to have \$800 out of the public stock, and for lesser hurts proportionately.

Article X. The captain and quartermaster to receive two shares of a prize; the master, boatswain, and gunner, one share and a half, and other officers, one and a quarter.

Article XI. The musicians to have rest on the Sabbath day, but the other six days and nights move without special favor.

The foregoing list of articles, copied from Johnson's "History of the Pirates," are interesting as indicating the discipline necessary on a pirate ship.

When we, who were out exploring pirate islands, arrived in Nassau, it was with the knowledge that we were treading upon historic pirate territory. The events immediately following our arrival were most practical in nature, for a mutiny broke out in our ship, one of the crew got drunk and accidentally walked the plank, and there were many other happenings of a most exciting nature. We certainly were in the pirate atmosphere, as shall be described in the succeeding story.



CONDEMNED PIRATE REPROACHING OLD CONRADES.

friends and companions quietly standing by to behold the spectacle."

"One Humphrey Mervin, in making his last remarks, called his spectators a lot of pusillanimous cowards. He thought it was a breach of honor in them not to rise and save their old companions from an ignominious death."

"When the officers in charge of the hanging told them that the time for speechmaking was getting short, and that they had better repent of their wickedness, one of the pirates spoke as follows:

"'Yes, I do heartily repent; I repent that I have not done more mischief, and that we did not cut the throats of those that took us; and I'm extremely sorry you ain't all hanged, as well as we.'"

"So do I," says another.

"And I," says a third.

"These speeches concluded the speechmaking, except one short address from Dennis Macarty."

"Some friends of mine have said that I would die with my shoes on, but they are liars," said he, as he kicked off his shoes."

Capt. England was one of the pirates who reformed but whose reformation didn't "take."

As a young man he was the mate of a sloop out of Jamaica and was captured by Capt. Winter, a pirate, just before their settlement at New Providence. England was said to be a good natured man who always treated his prisoners well. Also, he was not avaricious, and was content with moderate plunder. But he was weak and was generally overruled by his crew, and thus was led into doing many vile actions that he would have preferred not to do.

For example, while the captain was pirating near Sierra Leone, on the African coast, he captured the "Cadogan." Capt. Skinner, master. Now, Capt. Skinner used to be in command of a ship on which some of Capt. England's pirates served, and one of the latter, a cruel boatswain, was delighted to see his old master in this helpless state. He stared at

away at the British warships in a most galling manner, and we are led to believe that he was a most courageous pirate. But one day, after he had been pirating considerably, he came in sight of a big French man of war, about ten times as big as Vane's little brigantine. Vane was for making off in a great hurry, but John Rockham, another officer, was in favor of tackling the big man of war. Vane said it was too rash an undertaking, and, being captain, his word was law. So the brigantine sailed away and soon was out of sight of the man of war.

The next day the captain's behavior was obliged to stand the test of a vote. He was recalled, a resolution was passed branding him as a coward, deposing him from command, and turning him out of the company in disgrace.

So Vane and his supporters were put on board a small sloop, while Rockham assumed command of the brigantine. A few months later, after he had pirated more or less in his small sloop, the vessel was overtaken by a tornado off the coast of Honduras and the luckless pirates were cast upon a small, uninhabited island. For several weeks they lived there, subsisting on fish and turtles, until one day a ship put in for water. It was commanded by a buccaner, named Holford, who was an acquaintance of Vane.

This seemed a great piece of luck for Vane, and he at once asked his old friend to give him a lift off the island. Holford refused.

"Charles, I shan't trust you aboard my ship, unless I carry you a prisoner; for I shall have you rebelling with my men, knocking me on the head and run off with my ship a-pirating."

Vane protested on his word of honor, but Capt. Holford was too well acquainted with him to believe him.

"You can easily find a way to get off if you've a mind to," said Holford. "I am going down the bay," says he, "and shall return hither in about a month; and if I find you on the island when I come back, I'll



BLACKBEARD'S LITTLE JOKE.



THE CRUEL BOATSWAIN.